DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 104 RC 021 005

AUTHOR Rude, Harvey; And Others
TITLE Recruitment and Retention Problems in Paradise? Lessons from the Northern Mariana Islands.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 8p.; In: Promoting Progress in Times of Change: Rural Communities Leading the Way; see RC 020 986.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Employment Practices; Geographic Isolation; *Personnel Policy; Public Schools; Rural Education; *Special Education Teachers; *Teacher Persistence; *Teacher Recruitment; *Teacher Selection; Teacher Shortage
IDENTIFIERS *Northern Mariana Islands

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that examined teacher recruitment and retention practices in the Northern Mariana Islands public school system. The study was conducted due to shortages of special education teachers and related services personnel. Based on a review of school district documents on recruitment and retention practices and interviews with the Commissioner of Education and other educational stakeholders, a survey instrument was developed for interviewing teachers and administrators responsible for K-12 education on three Northern Mariana islands. As a result of these interviews, 17 recommendations were proposed that relate to "intent to employ" or employment contracts; involvement of administrators responsible for hiring personnel; development of a structured interview process for teacher screening and selection; access of administrators to recruitment information; a standard employment contract of 190 days rather than a 12-month contract; written procedures describing the recruitment process; designating one person to be responsible for recruitment and retention activities; a consistent salary model across all instructional staff members; extension of the Teacher Corps concept to 9th- and 10th-grade students; a recruitment videotape to chronicle the area's environment, activities, and opportunities; a systematic, comprehensive, and coordinated program of staff development; a comprehensive program of induction for all professional staff members; a formative teacher evaluation program; a uniform salary model that is competitive for all teachers; retirement deadlines prohibiting mid-year retirements; outreach recruitment programs to the community, families, and other human service agencies; and efforts to insure the diversity of professional educators. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DIANE MONTGOMERY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 406 104

Harvey Rude
University of Northern Colorado
Greeley, Colorado

Barbara Rudy
Public School System
Commonwealth of the Northern
Mariana Islands

Jane Storms
Western Regional Resource Center
Eugene, Oregon

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROBLEMS IN PARADISE? LESSONS FROM THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Introduction and Rationale

At the request of the Public School System for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), through the support of the Western Regional Resource Center in Eugene, Oregon, a study of the current practices for the recruitment and retention of teachers was conducted. The concern for effective recruitment and retention processes has been outlined in previous efforts of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. The annual report compiled to comply with the data requirements of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, which is part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, has consistently documented the significant shortage of special education teachers and related service providers (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Due to the inter-relatedness of special education and other teaching personnel, it was requested that a comprehensive approach to the issues of recruitment and retention of educational personnel in the Public School System be undertaken in the present study.

In conversations with technical assistance providers from the Western Regional Resource Center, a specific request to conduct this study was initiated. The official purpose which provided guidance for the activity was based on the need to: "...conduct a study identifying the current recruitment and retention patterns of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' Pubic School system and make recommendations to the special education coordinator to take to the Commissioner of Education regarding future efforts that would increase the retention rate." (Storms, 1993).

The efforts to recruit and retain qualified educators and special service providers to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have been an ongoing concern of the administrative officers in the Public School System in recent years. A great deal of time and resources have been devoted to recruitment activities through visitation of college and university sponsored teacher recruitment fairs in the mainland United States. Other locales that have been targeted for recruitment in past years include the Philippines, Australia, Samoa, Canada, and Guam.

The need to identify current practices which may have an influence on the recruitment and retention of qualified staff members for the Public School System was identified as a high priority. Based on the analysis and evaluation of this information, it was the intent to develop a number of recommendations which would improve the recruitment and retention efforts for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

RC 021005

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Background Information

Through telephone conversations with representatives from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System and the Western Regional Resource Center, the parameters of the investigation were identified. It was determined that a variety of documents related to recruitment and retention practices would be available for review prior to conducting a site visit to the various islands in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. A list of artifacts was constructed and requested for review which included the following: all pertinent agency policies and procedures on recruitment and retention; current demographics on professional educators employed by the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System; present or anticipated vacancy areas for educators; information on "Future Educators' Clubs;" strategic planning documents; personnel guidelines for professional educators including salary, benefits, and professional expectations; staff development programs sponsored by the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; teacher evaluation processes; collaborative agreements and working relationships with local institutions of higher education; and, description of local community "welcome wagon" initiatives.

As these artifacts were being assembled, a review of current literature on recruitment and retention practices was assembled and forwarded to the office of the Commissioner of Education. The intent of sending these materials was to familiarize the Public School System staff members with the potential outcomes of a study on recruitment and retention.

Based on a review of the artifacts, conversations with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands special education coordinator, and conversations with the Western Regional Resource Center technical assistance liaison, a tentative schedule of visitations was developed. The schedule included requests to interview the Commissioner of Education and staff, Board of Education representatives, building principals, classroom teachers, special education teachers and related service providers, community representatives, and representatives from other pertinent agencies in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands such as Northern Marianas College.

Methodology

The information from the various documents provided by the Public School System yielded a variety of questions concerning present recruitment and retention practices among educational personnel in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. In addition, a series of questions related to staff development opportunities, support for professional enhancement, and cultural orientation practices were identified. A series of questions were developed into a survey instrument on the topical areas of recruitment, retention, and other concerns related to living and working in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

An itinerary of visitations was constructed which allowed for visitation of Public School System teachers and administrators on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota in late May of 1994. These three islands constitute the major population centers within the Commonwealth, and provide all school programs to children in grades K-12. As questions were posed to each individual being interviewed, a transcript of the responses obtained was electronically recorded. Transcripts of interview responses were developed and made available for analysis.

Following a review of the information obtained through the interview process, an analysis and summary of results was constructed through a qualitative approach of content analysis (Borg & Gall, 1989). The interview results, in combination with data obtained from the various artifacts, provided the basis for a series of recommendations to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System. The recommendations are intended for consideration by all staff members within the Public School System to improve existing policies and develop more effective

procedures for the recruitment and retention of professional staff members within the organization.

Recommendations

Conclusions that are based on limited samples of information which is drawn from interview data and review of artifacts should be interpreted within the context of caution and objectivity. The objectivity results from the review by an impartial observer with limited knowledge of the complexities of the Public School System in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The caution which tempers this objectivity, specifically the difficulty in being able to obtain comprehensive information, provides the context for the following recommendations and discussion. The discussion of each recommendation is intended to provoke further dialogue concerning the feasibility and plausibility of each recommendation.

Recommendation One: The Public School System should consider the adoption of a streamlined recruitment process that enables recruiters to offer an "intent to employ" commitment or employment contract to applicants at the various sites from which they are recruited. The current process of sending recruiters from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to various teacher recruitment fairs in the mainland United States, Australia, Samoa, the Philippines, and other distant locations does not yield a substantial number of applicants. This may be due to the inability to provide firm commitments to prospective candidates until the recruiters have been able to carry home the interview and application information to principals and other hiring officials. To implement this recommendation with a high probability of success, it would be necessary for the responsible hiring official to develop a specific set of expectations for each vacancy including desired qualifications and experience, mandatory qualifications and experience, a detailed description of the position responsibilities, and any unusual expectations of the position. This would enable the recruiters to be effective and efficient in the use of their recruitment time.

Recommendation Two: The individuals within the Public School System who are responsible for hiring professional staff members should be routinely involved in the recruitment process on a rotating basis. The most effective approach to retention of professional staff members is to provide more opportunities for administrators who will have evaluation responsibility to take a direct role in the recruitment process. While it is not practical to expect that all building principals with position vacancies be involved in the recruitment process each year, it would be valuable to involve at least one building principal in each recruitment trip. The principal can be paired with an experienced recruiter from the central office staff to insure continuity and consistency in recruitment efforts.

Recommendation Three: The Public School System should consider adopting a structured interview approach to systematically determine the important themes to be addressed in the teacher screening and selection process, and the subsequent match between these themes and the prospective candidates. Several commercial organizations such as Selection Research Incorporated based in Lincoln, Nebraska, provide a number of structured interview approaches that can be adapted to meet the needs of the schools in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands with minimal disruption. The value of this approach is to develop a cadre of more discriminating and better prepared interviewers.

Recommendation Four: Recruitment information obtained on candidates should be more readily available to hiring officials, as well as the means to provide for more convenient contact between the hiring official and the prospective candidates. The current practice of videotaping the interviews of candidates is commendable. It would be more convenient to tape these interviews on VCR compatible equipment rather than utilizing beta tape equipment which has limited capacity for review by the staff members in the school system. While a beta compatible machine is presently available to staff members, there is limited availability of this equipment. If all tapes were

produced on VCR compatible equipment, it would be possible for building principals and other hiring officials to review the interviews at home or in their school building without checking out equipment from the central office. In addition, it is recommended that each hiring official be provided with a long distance calling card number to enable them to contact prospective candidates without travelling to the central office building to place these calls. The sense of urgency involved in attracting the best possible candidates for vacant positions makes this investment a great value in the long term.

Recommendation Five: The Public School System should adopt a standard employment contract of 190 days rather than the present twelve month expectation for professional staff members. A large majority of the individuals who were interviewed pointed to problems that result from the current twelve month contract expectation on the part of the school system. From the review of documents and consultation with teachers and administrators, the need for contractual commitments from teachers and special service providers during the summer months when students are not in session was not evident. The necessary exceptions to this recommendation must be considered to include the extended year contact commitments to necessary personnel such as administrators and extended school year program staff.

Recommendation Six: A set of written procedures that describe the recruitment process should be developed by Public School System staff members. A number of useful recruitment procedures have been developed over the years by staff within the school system, but the potential to refine and further develop these efforts is hampered by a lack of systematic description and articulation of existing practice. An excellent example of a recent development in this area is the Recruitment Brochure that was prepared to provide realistic and accurate information to potential teacher recruits.

Recommendation Seven: To facilitate the recruitment and retention processes in the Public School System, the designation by position of one individual with overall responsibility for these functions should be considered. The present operation within the school system resembles "personnel action by committee" in many respects. There does not appear to be a central responsible administrator who is clearly identified as the personnel officer. It would be viable to consider appointing one individual from within the central office administrative staff to the responsibilities of Personnel Coordinator. This position could be charged with the coordinating role for all matters related to recruitment and retention. This consolidation of job targets in the area of personnel would assist in developing an articulated and clearly defined set of personnel practices.

Recommendation Eight: Provide a consistent salary model to all instructional staff members employed by the Public School System. The practice of providing housing allowances to off-island hires contributes to the difficulties in attracting potentially qualified natives to Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands position vacancies in education. Several native teachers and administrators who were interviewed as a part of the present investigation pointed out the inequities that have resulted from this practice. The intent of the school system to build capacity through the development of local teacher education candidates through the Teacher Corps program based at Marianas High School is commendable. By providing a single salary model without individual deviations for educators who are recruited from outside the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, it may possible to improve the overall competitiveness in salaries to all teachers in the system.

Recommendation Nine: The Teacher Corps concept should be extended downward to encompass grades nine and ten in the high school and potentially encourage students at the junior high school program to consider education as a future profession. Several individuals provided strong support for the efforts of the Teacher Corps in the effort to nurture an upcoming pipeline of

potential future teachers. The value of extending the benefits of this effort to younger students in the Public School System is to provide awareness of the career potential in education to a much broader audience of students. In addition, it would be prudent to provide career awareness activities at a much earlier age to take advantage of promising students who would not readily consider the benefits of pursuing a career as a professional educator.

Recommendation Ten: The Public School System should consider developing a short videotape production which chronicles the environment, activities, and opportunities for employment within the organization in a realistic manner. A videotape production would serve as an invaluable recruitment tool for individuals to employ on their recruitment trips. In the event that the school system decides to contract the recruitment of teachers to outside agencies, such a production would be of great value to private vendors in securing a match between the personnel needs of the Public School System and the available talent seeking employment as an educator within the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Recommendation Eleven: The Public School System should initiate a systematic, comprehensive, and coordinated program of staff development at the building level for all schools in the system. A variety of service and continuing education offerings are presently available to professional educators in the school system. The most notable of these is the certification program based on the local language and culture. It would be useful to consider the content of this program in light of identified needs for staff development that are assessed from educators in the various schools on Rota, Tinian, and Saipan. Expansion of the centrally offered and delivered certification program should be consistent with the aims and priorities identified by each school building through its professional staff.

Recommendation Twelve: A comprehensive program of induction support to all professional staff members within the Public School System should be initiated. One of the most effective strategies to facilitate the success of professional educators is to pair novices to an existing system with veteran educators who are available to provide mentor assistance and support for an extended period of time. The mentor concept was identified by some principals as available with the Public School System, but clearly not through a systematic and coordinated process. A worthwhile suggestion for effective mentoring of new hires is the creation of a three part mentor role program to include a lifelong resident of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands who is familiar with local cultural norms and expectations to serve in the role of cultural mentor, a master teacher to serve in the role of educational mentor, and the incoming novice teacher or apprentice. This triangulated mentor approach would ensure the sound transition of educators to a successful experience within the schools and local community.

Recommendation Thirteen: A formative system of teacher evaluation practices should be instituted at the building level for the purpose of improving instruction. The most widely mentioned teacher evaluation tool cited by professional staff members who were interviewed was the Marianas Instrument for the Observation of Teaching Activities (MIOTA). The degree to which the MIOTA was employed by supervisors was not consistent, and several evaluators spoke to the limitations of the instrument. The degree of employee satisfaction is frequently ;determined by the amount of support and encouragement provided by employers to improve their performance. Evaluation models which focus on peer coaching, performance based assessment, and other formative strategies for the improvement of teacher skills, knowledge and professional dispositions are critical to the retention of promising teacher recruits to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The key to implementation of these potential models is the ownership by building principals who see their responsibility as instructional leaders within the Public School System. It would be advisable to provide systematic evaluator training to all building principals within the school system to systematically support their role as instructional leaders and clinical supervisors.

Recommendation Fourteen: The salary model for all teachers within the Public School System should be evaluated for consistency and competitiveness to attract and retain quality teachers. A uniform salary model which is competitive for all teachers would potentially eliminate the need to offer housing allowances to off-island hires. Several native teachers spoke about the inequity posed by the current practice of providing a housing allowances to the off-island employees.

Recommendation Fifteen: The procedures governing retirement of teachers from the Public School System should be strengthened to include provisions that prohibit mid-year retirements. A calendar of retirement deadlines would insure a greater level of continuity in staffing from year to year. In addition, the retirement deadlines would ensure that positions do not become vacant in the middle of the school term. Several interviews pointed to the lack of understanding of the current retirement program to the extent that most teachers did not realize that they would receive retirement program to the extent that most teachers did not realize that they would receive retirement benefits once vested in the system. Many teachers believe they must leave the Public School System prior to becoming vested in the retirement system or forfeit the dollars that have been invested in the plan. Enhanced communication of the benefits to the individuals who become recipients of the school system's retirement program would potentially increase the retention rate of the teachers.

Recommendation Sixteen: The Public School System could consider providing outreach programs to the community, families, and other human service agencies concerning the specific recruitment and retention issues for professional staff members in the schools. The outreach programs should be constructed in the spirit of a dialogue between the school system and its constituents. The linkages that would result would enhance the understanding of the problem areas in recruiting and retaining qualified instructional staff, and enlist the support of the greater Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands community in supporting present efforts. Some potential topics for consideration include the issues of teacher orientation/induction, community education, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands culture, and systematic parent education.

Recommendation Seventeen: The diversity of the teaching force in the Public School System should be strengthened to more accurately reflect the diversity in the student population. The changing nature of the school population in recent years has produced a situation where upwards of thirty different cultural groups are represented in the students and families served by the Public School System. Every effort should be made to ensure that professional educators who work in the school system also reflect this diversity while maintaining a sensitivity to the majority culture of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The uniqueness of the various schools found on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota represents a major strength in the educational opportunities to students and families who benefit from their educational expertise. At the same time, the increasing demands of a global society will continue to place larger demands on the Public School System to employ a more broadly represented multicultural teaching force. The selection of qualified teachers and other educational professionals from a variety of countries and cultures can assist the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in meeting the challenges of recruiting and retaining an outstanding cadre of professional educators. Such professionals will demonstrate the skill, knowledge, and professional dispositions required to meet the challenges of quality education for all Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands students into the twenty-first century.

Summary

The difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified special educators are extremely difficult, even in paradise. While the island life style is initially attractive to prospective educators, the isolation and disconnection from mainstream culture are significant barriers to long term development of

professional educators within the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System. The issues of multicultural perspective pose an ongoing challenge for an educational system that is very remote and often isolated from different ideas across the Pacific rim.

The seventeen recommendations offered in this report provide a starting place for addressing the concerns of attracting and retaining the best qualified teachers and related service providers for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. On the national scene (U. S. Department of Education, 1995), the issues of supply and demand for special educators continues to be an issue of emergency proportions for virtually every state, territory, and commonwealth of the United States. Hodgekinson (1996) reported on the demographics associated with these issues at the Sixteenth Annual American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) conference in Baltimore. Each state has identified the magnitude of this concern through the data reporting requirements of its Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The value of this information is to provide a clear indication of concerns and potential strategies that address the challenges of providing teachers and related service professionals that meet the expectations for the provision of a quality educational experience to every learner. The issues of rural and remote locations should not be a significant barrier to achieving this goal if approached from the perspective of the total system. The viewpoint of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands serves as an example that can provide guidance for other rural and remote school systems with recruitment and retention concerns.

References

Borg, W. R. & Gall, M. D. (1989). Educational research: An introduction (5th ed.). New York: Longman, Incorporated.

Hodgekinson, H. W. (1996). Demographic issues for rural special education. Keynote presentation at the 1996 American Council on Rural Special Eduction National Conference, Baltimore, Maryland.

Storms, J. (1993). Personal communication. Eugene, Oregon: Western Regional Resource Center.

U. S. Department of Education. (1993). Fifteenth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Washington, DC: author.

U. S. Department of Education. (1995). Projection of education statistics to 2005. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.